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The Honorable Roland W. Burris
230 South Dearborn
Chicago, IL
60604

Dear Senator Burris,

On behalf of Prairie Rivers Network, Illinois' statewide river conservation organization, I am writing to urge you to vote for the Baucus-Klobuchar-Boxer Amendment to the Clean Water Restoration Act (S. 787). Recent movement on this bill presents an historic opportunity to protect our remaining vital water resources. We believe this bill would provide the legal structure to save critical wetlands and intermittent streams that prevent flooding disasters, recharge drinking water supplies, and ensure enough clean water for future generations.

Since the Supreme Court rulings of 2001 (*SWANCC*) and 2006 (*Rapanos*), many wetlands and small, intermittent streams have lost or are in danger of losing historic protections under the Clean Water Act. In Illinois, we have already lost over 85% of our wetlands since European settlement began, so we cannot afford to lose any more.

Streams and wetlands are critical for flood protection and control, water purification, wildlife habitat, and human recreation. As our climate changes, wetlands and streams will provide refuges and migration corridors for plants and animals as they respond and adapt to changing conditions in their natural habitats.

The Clean Water Restoration Act would return us to pre-SWANCC, when isolated wetlands and intermittent streams were still protected. The way CWRA restores these protections is by removing the term "navigable waters" (originally defined as "waters of the U.S.") and replacing it with "waters of the U.S.". "Waters of the U.S." is then defined as including the breadth of natural waterways in addition to the mere 2% of waterways that are truly navigable. This change is critically important because it acknowledges the importance of water bodies that are seasonal or intermittent in nature, but are nevertheless crucial to the healthy functioning of water resources. The CWRA also maintains existing agricultural exemptions that farmers have enjoyed for years. Failure to pass the bill will undermine President Obama's budget initiative to restore the Great Lakes (including its wetlands) and Illinois' beloved Lake Michigan.

There is a clear need for a legislative fix, and we believe CWRA will do the job. The Supreme Court decisions have created a cloud of regulatory ambiguity that has weakened the power and clarity of the Clean Water Act; this ambiguity is wasting the valuable time of Corps of Engineers and EPA staff and taxpayer dollars.

Please let me know if you have further questions. I have enclosed copies of our factsheet on this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stacy James, Ph.D.
Water Resources Scientist

Cc: Eleanor Bastian

July 14, 2009